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NSC BRIEFING

29 August 1956

BACKGROUND--SUEZ: ANNEX A - CANAL PILOT DATA

I. Prior to the crisis, the European canal company considered that 243 pilots was the minimum required to handle the current level of canal traffic.

A. At the beginning of 1956 there were 187 canal pilots on duty, including 56 French, 52 British and 32 Egyptians.

B. At the time of nationalization, it is estimated that 205 pilots were on duty. Thus, a shortage existed even prior to the crisis

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C. Since nationalization, at least 23 additional Egyptian pilots have been hired. However, failure of some European pilots to return to Egypt from leave has contributed to the present shortage.

II. Of approximately 155 non-Egyptian canal pilots, 143 have reaffirmed loyalty to the European-owned canal company and expressed a desire for repatriation.

A. The company is reported to have instructed all its 1,387 non-Egyptian employees to leave Egypt if the forthcoming Cairo discussions failed to settle the Suez dispute within an agreed time limit--reportedly by 15 September.

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III. Egypt has reduced Suez convoys from 2 a day in each direction to one a day in each direction.

A. This change had actually been considered by the European Company in June in order to reduce pressure on the overworked pilots.

B. The schedule change has reduced the backlog of vessels awaiting passage and the number of vessels transiting the canal is being maintained at the normal rate of approximately 40-45 ships per day.

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